MUSIC AND POLITICS: POPULAR MUSIC IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL SINCE 1967

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Abstract

Over the 40 years since the 1967 War, which redrew the map of the Middle East and engineered a future of violence, Israelis and Palestinians have subtly but significantly changed how they use popular music to envision the ongoing conflict for land and identity. Initially, both sides used music to convey their irreconcilable differences and encourage resistance through monolithic, highly nationalistic characterization of the conflict, which expressed devotion to reclaiming or defending physical place, particularly Jerusalem. While this nationalist tradition still continues on both sides, by the late 1970s the message and even the actual musical style employed by a growing number of Palestinian and Israeli artists began to converge to express a mutual desire for peace and reconciliation through the creation of a shared cultural space, a realm of cooperation which transcends the territorial dispute between the two groups, to advocate a larger goal of cooperation and harmony across the Middle East.

Beginning with the nationalistic songs of Fairuz in the late 1960s and 1970s, many of which center on the importance of the physical place of Jerusalem to Palestinian identity, and shifting to the sounds of hope and reconciliation popularized by Mustapha Al Kurd and Suhail Khoury in the 1980s, popular music has become a vehicle for the emergence of a new mental sphere of social interchange and imagination, focusing less on claiming physical place or returning to a pre-conflict past, and more on the creation of a cultural space where both sides can exist equally and fairly. Israeli popular music over the last 40 years, too, has shifted from a medium dominated by the Western European and Slavic musical canon to incorporate many of the "Oriental" roots of Jewish music, exemplified by the current genre of *musica mizrakhit*, a fusion

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of Eastern and Western Jewish musical traditions popularized by Chava Alberstein, Ofra Haza and Yair Dalal. This recognition of the many non-European, Middle Eastern Jewish musical traditions alive in Israel today---a recognition that the two groups in political conflict are not nearly as culturally different as claimed---serves as a narrow but important bridge between Arabs and Jews used by many musician to call for peace and coexistence. As Israeli historian Meron Benvenisti belatedly recognized in 1995, "The outline of our native lands' panorama is composed not only of the physical landscape, flora and fauna, but of people, and if follows that there is no Eretz Israel without Arabs." He continued: "The Hebrew map on one level of my consciousness is intertwined with a second, Arab level. I am well aware of the great bond to their birthplace that millions of Palestinians keep secure in their hearts,"[1]

The potential of popular music is this case is as a mechanism of inter-cultural communication and education, serving as a cultural rather than a physical place for each side to experiment and create new socio-cultural roles that are not yet attainable through politics. Music is a unique medium, special as a human form of expression in its ability to physically engage and emotionally transform its listeners, particularly many of the

Eastern musical traditions, such as *tarab*.[2] In contrast to the nationalistic claims concerning the importance of or exclusive right to a particular *place*, much current popular music is Israel and Palestine is calling for the emergence of a new socio-cultural *mental space* governed by new, shared social relations to provide a lasting peace.

The reality of Jerusalem can be imagined in two alternative ways, and that is precisely the shift that is taking place through popular music---either a nationalistic desire to destroy the other side in political and military battle or the acceptance of the permanence of both the Israeli and Palestinian populations leading to a new focus on building a reality in which all parties can reasonably live together. In the first case, represented by the nationalist musical forms of the 1960s and 1970s, Jerusalem is the exclusive right of one side or the other, the present reality of which is expressed by Moshe Amirav, a veteran of the 1967 war:

[1]Meron Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies: Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land* (Berleley: University of California Press, 1995), 211.
[2]A.J Tarab, *Making Music in the Arab World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

> Jerusalem is not a united city. It is a divided city, one of the most divided in the world; more divided than Belfast. In the euphoria of 1967, we annexed 28 Arab villages that later on became Arab neighborhoods. Our aim was to enlarge the Jewish population, but we did all the most stupid things possible.[3]

Thesituation can also be imagined another way, the reality of which is elucidated by chief Palestinian negotiator Faisal Husseni following the 1993 Oslo Accord: " I dream of the day when a Palestinian will say 'Our Jerusalem' and will mean Palestinians and Israelis, and an Israeli will say 'Our Jerusalem' and will mean Israelis and Palestinians." In response to such an imagined future, Israeli scholars, writers and former Knesset members stated, "Jerusalem is ours, Israelis and Palestinians---Muslims, Christians and

Jews. Our Jerusalem must be united, open to all and belonging to all its inhabitants, without borders and barbed wire in its midst."[4]

The importance of reclaiming the physical place conquered by Israel during the 1967 War---East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and Sinai and the Gaza Strip from Egypt---is clearly evident in the nationalism expressed by perhaps the most famous musical advocate for the right of Palestinian return---Fairuz. A Maronite Christine of Lebanese birth who composed lyrics demanding that the territorial losses and refugee crisis suffered since 1948 be rectified, one of her most enduring songs on the theme is "Zahrat al-Mada'in", or "The Flower of All Cities," directly referencing the divided city itself.[5] A transcript is as follows:

I

To you, oh City of Prayer

I pray.

To you, the one with the most beautiful buildings

The flower of all cities.

To you Jerusalem,

[3] J. Kifner, "The Holiest City, The Toughest Conflict" *The New York Times*, 23 July 2000, P. 4.
[4] K. Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Random House, 1996), 419.
[5]Nasser al-Taee, "Voices of Peace: Popular Music, Nationalism and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East," *Popular Music*, 21/1 2002, pp. 44.

The City of Prayer,

I pray

II

It is to you that our eyes journey everyday;

They roam through the narrow streets of your temples

And reach out to the old churches,

Wiping out the sorrow from the mosques.

III

Oh the night of *Isra*,

The path for those who ascended to heaven,

Our eyes journey to you every day

And I pray.

IV

The child in the cave

And His mother Mary

Are two crying faces.

Crying for those who have been forced out of their homes,

Children without shelter

Those who defended it and died in the smoke of wars.

And peace became a martyr

In the Land of Peace.

And justice collapsed by the smoke of wars.

When the city of Jerusalem fell

Love subsided

And in your hearts, war resided.

V

The glowing anger is coming

And I am full of faith
The glowing anger is coming
I'll overcome my sorrows.
From all paths,
Riding horses of fear,
And like the glowing face of God,
It's coming.
The gate to our city will never shut
For I am going to pray.
I will knock on doors,
And I'll open all doors.
And you, oh river of Jordan
Will wash my face with your holly water,
And you will wash away all the traces of barbarism
And we'll defeat the forces of evil.

VI

The house is ours,
And Jerusalem is ours.
And with our hands,
We will bring to Jerusalem
It's beauty and peace.
And to Jerusalem
Peace is coming.

Through the content of the lyrics and orchestra accompaniment, Fairuz voices the rising post-1967 Arab nationalism to show Israel as the instigator of the struggle, terror and war; Jerusalem, Fairuz sings, is for the Arabs. Israelis also used their own nationalistic motifs in music to claim Jerusalem only for themselves and to justify their occupation. The Israeli genre of *shirei eretz Israel* (the songs of the land of Israel), Particularly popular with the Army Entertainment Ensembles, expressed the ideological and political atmosphere of the time by creating songs with

strong Zionist symbolism such as "Yrushalayim Shel Zahav" (Jerusalem of Gold) and "Lakh Yrushalayim" (Your Jerusalem) to celebrate the passing of the city to Jewish control.[6] And, indeed, much of Israeli music still reflects this political pledge to keep Jerusalem Jewish, existing alongside and competing with the emergent genre calling for peace and reconciliation. In the political realm, Prime Minister Ehud Barak, for example, campaigned largely on the promise to keep Jerusalem under Israeli control.[7]

Under the nationalist type of music of both the Israeli and Palestinian tradition, neither side is willing to recognize the reality or the permanence of the other, nor do they recognize the legitimacy of the other based on their historical roots in the region.

Precisely because the history of Israel as a nation state is so short the utility of its popular music is based on how well it promotes and creates national identity, so most of it is centered around European tradition such as *zemer ivry* (Hebrew Song), while other more "ethnic" traditions much closer to the Arab style or outright Arab style common to the Sephardic, Yemeni or Baghdadi Jews was pushed to the margins or totally excluded from national broadcast and delegated to the realm of low culture until recently.[8]

Physical place as depicted in nationalist Palestinian and Israel music is a place of struggle and war, of the total victory and destruction of the other, centered heavily on monopolizing ownership over Jerusalem. But the city can also represent the alternative, a place of peace and reconciliation, not only between the two immediately involved parties,

But also between religions and races across the Middle East, and it is this theme that is becoming increasingly popular in contemporary music.

Indeed, each of the three monotheistic religions holds a special claim over Jerusalem as central to its religious traditions. For Muslims, Jerusalem or *al Quds* is the

[6]M. Regev, "The Musical Soundscape as a Contested Area: Oriental Music and Israeli Popular Music," *Media, Culture and Society*, 8/3 1986, pp. 345.
[7]D. Sontag, "Clinton Wades Into the Details of Mideast Negotiations" *The New York Times*, 25 July 2000, Section A.
[8]J. Halper, "Musica Mizrakhit: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," *Popular Music*, 8/2 1989, pp. 136.

Center of a religious sanctuary comprised of the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque, out of which Muhammad rose to heaven. For Jews, the city is home to the Wailing wall of the Second Temple built by Jews following their exile from Babylon. While for Christians, Jerusalem is the place of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Once a place all three religions shared and coexisted in, following the 1967 war it became divided between the three constituent groups, and a place of irreconcilable conflict. Even after more than two weeks of Camp David talks sponsored by President Bill Clinton in 2000 between Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, hopes of a historic peace treaty came to not, in large part due to an inability to solve questions of a divided Jerusalem.[9]

In more contemporary Palestinian and Israel music, however, symbolism is used to transcend the immediate conflict over territorial place in order to create a new cultural space of peaceful coexistence. Following the Oslo Accord, the musical group Sabreen moved beyond its earlier work undertaken during the *intifadah* such as "Mawat al-Nabi" (Death of a Prophet) to celebrate the hope of a lasting peace, singing lyrics by Palestinian poets Mahmud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim with titles like "The Doves are Coming."[10] In imagining a new future, Sabreen sings:

Your foodis a locust
Dipped in a drop on honey
Your dress, burlap and camel hair,
Your path is thorns, its flowers few.
O moon on the outer edge
O prophet exiled
Calling in the wilderness:
Widen the roads
For the deer of love and peace
Widen the roao0ids,
The doves are coming from the mountain,
The doves are coming.

[9] al-Taee, Popular Music, 42.
[10] Ibid, 51.

But not all the shift from songs of nationalism and resistance to peaceful coexistence was directly linked to changes in the political process. Two of the earliest and most celebrated Palestinian singers of this genre, Mustapha Al Kurd and Suhail Khoury, began calling for peaceful coexisting beginning in the late 1970s. Both musicians not only advocated cooperation and collaboration between the antagonistic groups, but did the same with their music, combining Arab folk music with pop and Western rock styles, transcending the confines of earlier Arab nationalist musical forms to spread a more cosmopolitan, utopian message of peace in the Middle East.[11]

The significance of using music as a medium to spread a message of peaceful coexistence comes not only from the power of the message conveyed through the lyrics and instrumentation, but also in its form as electronic media. Through the production and distribution of cassette tapes or compact discs, both Israelis and Palestinians can be an audience to a social and political performance without actually being present. People can
Communicate directly with one another without even physically meeting. The walls, borders and checkpoints designed by the Israelis lose some of their effectiveness as barriers to change, impediments to social and cultural interaction, as well as the enforcement of an apartheid system of division. Musicians became just as dangerous as armed fighters under the occupation. Suhail Khoury explains:

> The Israelis did quite a good marketing service for me because they announce on the Radio and TV that I was arrested for making music and could be imprisoned for ten Years. So everybody wanted to know what kind of tape that was. Of course, I'm laughing now, but I was tortured for twelve days. They wanted to know who composed, who sang, who played. I didn't tell them anything and I was sentenced to six months imprisoned.[12]

On the current Israeli music scene artists are also making similar calls for peace.

[11] A. Morgan, "Palestinian Music: The sound of Struggle," in *World Music: The Rough Guide* (London: The Penguin Press, 1999), 386.
[12] A. Morgan, *World Music*, 387.

Chava Alberstein and Noa (Achinoam Nini) are perhaps the two best known in this genre. Alberstein's songs, which espouse a pacifistic social program routinely come under threat of being banned by the state, particularly those that refer to the violence and brutality of Israeli soldiers against the *awlad al-hijarah*, of children of stones, (Nasser, p.52). In explaining the inspiration for her songs, she states:

I base it on a traditional song we sing at Passover when we sit down to eat together. It is something like 'The Woman who Swallowed a Fly.' In this version a dog bites A cat, a stick beats the dog, fire burns the stick, water puts out the fire, an ox drinks the water, a butcher kills the ox and then the Angel of Death comes, and so on. It is a circle of violence, and I wanted to make a modern song about this, and how you can get drawn into violence.[13]

The most important development of all, however, beyond Israeli and Palestinian artists singing for peace in their own respective geographical and cultural areas, is the emerging trend of artistic cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian musicians. Begun in the 1980s and continuing to the present, this genre is marked by songs calling for cooperation and peaceful coexistence, as well as the penetration of the "Oriental" musical style into the Israeli mainstream as a accepted popular art form. By 1948, "Oriental" or Arab music performed by both Palestinians as well as Israeli Jews of Eastern heritage

Began to experience unprecedented popularity in sales via amateur-made cassettes sold

Unofficially all across Israel at places like the Tel Aviv Central Bus Station.[14]Accepting the tradition of Eastern Jewish music into mainstream Israeli culture in a very real sense showed the contradictions of the past inherent in contemporary Israeli culture. Despite the Israeli government's attempt to present itself and the country as almost totally European through the favoritism showed *zemer ivry* (Hebrew song) and *shirei eretz Israel*(the songs of the land of Israel) programming on national radio and television broadcasts, mush of the traditions of large

[13]S. Broughton, "Chava Alberstein: Israel's Joan Baez," in World Music: *The Rough Guide* (London: The Penguin Press, 1999), 364.
[14]M. Regev, *Media, Cultural and Society*, 351.

swathes of the Israeli population are culturally and psychologically linked to their past in the Iranian, Bukharian, Morrocan, Yemeni and Iraqi Jewish communities which thrived under the ottoman Empire.[15]

The first known example of actual musical collaboration took place in 1986 when Palestinian singer Amal Murkus performed "Shalom Salaam" at the annual children's song festival, at whichMurkus also joined with Israeli singer Ci Hayman to perform "Shooting and Crying," as well as with Corrine Alal in "I Have No Other Land."[16]As Perelson explains:

One must take into consideration that this phenomenon flourished at the
Very height of the intifadah, and so makes an unequivocal political statement.
Undoubtedly, the penetration of Arab songs into the canon of Hebrew song is
Much more immediate and direct than the parallel process in the literary system,
Since popular music is a less formal cultural domain.[17]

At the 1990 annual children's song festival Palestinian Samir Shukri and Israeli Ehud Manor performed "How Long Must We Wait" with lyrics evocative of dove imagery.[18]
Like a bird on the wing

Man glides,
A loving heart, an open heart
Is not always wrong
We are in the desert of eternity for thousands of years,
But he who listens will hear the bells ring
Like an ancient prayer.
May the earth be peaceful for forty years
Till the dove returns,

[15]A. Shiloah, "The Dynamic of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel," *Ethnomusicology*, 27/2 1983, pp. 241.
[16]I. Perelson, "Power Relations in the Israeli Popular Music System," *Popular Music*, 17/1 1998, pp.119.
[17] Ibid, 120.
[18]Ibid, 199.

But from Moses to Mohammed
This land was not soothed
How long must we wait? How long can we go on?
How long must we wait? We will never rest.
The sons of Moses and the sons of Mohammed will go up the mountains

I will not lock the door
I will not lock the heart
Because the sun of hope permeates me
I hear the violin and I hear the ud
And suddenly I know that not all is lost
Like the earth, be peaceful for forty years
Till the doves return.

Another significant Israeli artist working in this genre of construction links between the two groups is Yair Dalal, the son of Jewish-Iraqi parents who grew up equally in the Jewish and Arab musical and cultural traditions. He blends not only these Two together, but also includes the musical heritage of India and Turkey, too, playing instruments as diverse as the ud, sitar, guitar, violin, clarinet, table, as well as a variety of other Middle Eastern percussion. In 1994, Dalal played in Oslo at the one-year anniversary of the signing of the peace accord, singing "Zaman el Salam" (Time for Peace) along with a chorus of fifty Israeli and fifty Palestinian children.[19] The song, sung in both Hebrew and Arabic, symbolized his dream of co-existence and cooperation.

Arabic:

Like and ocean---peace, my love,
Has a wide embracing soul.
There are times of ebb and flow
In the days of struggle and sorrow,
Between storms and thunder,
Feeling burstout---my love,
Time for peace---*inshallah*

[19]al-Taee, *Popular Music*, 53.

Hebrew:

There is a time, I know
From faraway, I long
Like a lone star in the rain
Up there in the sky.
There are times of ebb and flow
In days of struggle and of sorrow
Out of lighting, the rainbow glows
And I'll know, the time has come
Time for peace---Inshallah.

After the concert was over Dalal stated, "Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat were there, but they weren't speaking. After hearing the song they signed a contract they hadn't signed before. Perhaps it's naïve to believe that music can influence the Peace Process, but I believe it."[20]

In the most recent examples of this kind of cross-cultural collaboration to imagine a peaceful future, in 1999 the late Palestinian scholar of comparative literature Edward Said and conductor Daniel Barenboim created the West-Eastern Divan in Weimar, Germany, a symphony orchestra comprised of Arab and Israeli musicians, which has performed across the world, from Ramallah to Carnegie Hall.[21] The concert in Ramallah was even filmed and made into a documentary film by Emmy-winning director Paul Smaczny. For all but the most discerning audiences it is virtually impossible to tell which musicians are Palestinian and which Israeli. In another instance, following the most recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon, three yeshiva students in Jerusalem organized a benefit concert featuring Israeli and Arab artists, ranging is styles from hip-hop to Arab-
Israeli folk experimental electronic music, in order to raise funds for both Israeli and Lebanese victims of violence.[22]

[20]S. Broughton, *World Music*, 366.
[21]M. Swed, "Making a Play for Peace: Divan Orchestra Brings Together Arab and Israeli Musicians and Shows that Talent is Worldwide," *The Los Angeles Times*, 21 December 2006, p. 4.
[22]Ben Baginsky, "A Group of Yeshiva Students Raises Funs for both Israeli and Lebanese Victims," *TheJerusalem Post*, 1 September 2006, p. 22.

Although subtle, and by no means a mass movement, since 1967 both Israelis and Palestinians have significantly changed how they use popular music to envision the ongoing conflict for land and identity. The potential of popular music in this case is as a mechanism of inter-cultural communication and education, serving as a cultural rather than a physical place for each side to experiment and create new socio-cultural roles that are not yet attainable through politics. In contrast to the nationalistic claims concerning the importance of or exclusive right to a particular *place*, much current popular music in Israel and Palestine is calling for the emergence of a new socio-cultural *mental space* governed by new, shared social relations to provide a lasting peace. Perhaps the most important role popular music can play is to provide both sides in the conflict with a mental image of what peace will look like before that reality is achievable politically.